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Ohio House Finance Committee

Am. Sub H.B. 166

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Testimony Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, Executive Director
Ohio Association of Foodbanks

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Minority Member Cera, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify and for your previous support of our 12 Feeding America Foodbanks, and 3,541 non-profit, faith-based and place based food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and new in-demand site based agencies, including the K-12 schools, 2 and 4 year colleges and universities, low-income senior housing, child care and health care clinic emergency food providers.

Over 80 percent of ALL our charities are faith-based, volunteer-driven, and operating on budgets of less than \$25,000 a year. Today, in 2019 we are serving 12% more emergency food providers then we did just 2 years ago, and many of our charities are reporting a significant reductions in private sector donations of both funding and food, to meet their need for more food, personal care and households cleaning items to meet the needs of their hungry friends and neighbors.

HB 166 provides flat funding at \$19.55 million per year to support 2 critical hunger lifelines, the Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP) have been supported on a bipartisan bases by five governors, 11 General Assemblies, and funded through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) budget.

These programs prevent food waste, reduce loss for farmers and growers, increase and sustain employment in Ohio, representing the most nutritious food our foodbanks distribute, and, most importantly, provides over 25% of all the food we distribute and is the most wholesome food we purchase for pennies on the pound. This funding helps Ohio farmers and hungry Ohioans – sounds like a win-win to me.

Earlier this week, Feeding America released its newest *Map the Meal Gap*, research which reveals that food insecurity exists in every county. This county level research helps us to understand where household incomes are falling short and leaving families unsure about how to afford enough nutritious food. I encourage each of you to visit the website, www.map.feedingamerica.org to find out what hunger looks like in your district and community.

The report shows that Ohio's rate of food insecurity is significantly higher than the national average and its Midwestern peers. More than 1 in 7 Ohioans – including 1 in 5 children – still don't always have the resources they need to afford enough food in their own, despite an economic recovery that we're to believe has made things better for everyone.

Top 10 Ohio Counties for Highest Overall Food Insecurity	
Name of County	Rate of Food Insecurity
Athens County	19.3%
Cuyahoga County	18.4%
Lucas County	17.5%
Scioto County	17.4%
Hamilton County	17.2%
Adams County	17.2%
Montgomery County	17.0%
Meigs County	16.5%
Franklin County	16.5%
Mahoning County	16.4%

Let me be clear. Food insecurity does not only impact the very poor. It also impacts the growing number of seniors and disabled Ohioans who are living on low fixed incomes and struggling to manage their chronic illnesses, age in their homes, and sometimes care for grandchildren they've graciously taken into their homes. It impacts low-wage workers who find that their paychecks don't stretch to cover housing, healthcare, transportation, child care, and enough healthy groceries to feed their families.

In fact, this week's new *Map the Meal Gap* report found that about half of all food insecure Ohioans live in households that earn too much to qualify for help from SNAP. For those 829,000 people, food pantries and soup kitchens are the only safety net they have.

The report estimates that an average meal in Ohio costs about \$2.76. That's a very modest budget to afford a healthy breakfast, lunch, or dinner and assumes an ability to shop cost-effectively and prepare home-cooked meals, three times a day. But let's assume that's possible. For a family of three, it would cost them about \$750 a month to afford enough food on their own to feed themselves. Unfortunately, food insecure families report that they fall short about \$15.50 per person each week when it comes to their food budgets. That means a family of three is falling short nearly \$200 a month. They're coping in a lot of ways. They're buying cheaper, less healthy food. They're cutting portion sizes or skipping meals. They're trading one late bill payment or one skipped medication for another. They're borrowing from family and friends. And they're turning to our hunger relief network for help.

Our statewide Associations request your support for an amendment of \$10 million per year to provide total funding of \$30 million per year to support our efforts to make sure needy Ohioans don't have to make harmful choices. That might sound like a lot to some members of this body. But it represents less than 4 percent of the \$797 million-dollar annual meal gap that food insecure Ohioans face.

We're calling on you to be forward thinkers. Remember what less nutritious food means to a child trying to learn. Remember what skipped medications or malnutrition means to a senior on the fast track to a nursing home. Remember the indignity a low-wage worker must feel when they must choose between putting gas in their car to get to work or food on the table to feed their kids.

We know you have difficult choices to make and that you are committed to being responsible stewards of taxpayer money. We operate proven programs and public-private partnerships that feed people while lifting up our agricultural community in the process. Investing in healthy, locally grown food for people who can't always afford to buy it on their own is responsible stewardship. It gives kids the chance to focus at school, empowers workers to be productive on the job, fosters healthy seniors that can age in place, and reduces health care costs. It rescues surplus agriculture products grown and raised right here in Ohio and provides basic economic security to Ohio farmers and producers.

Simply put, it makes sense to invest funding designated by the federal government for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families for the assistance of needy families. I strongly urge you to reconsider our request for an amendment of \$10 million per year to support additional funding for Ohio's foodbanks and our 3,541 hunger relief agencies and more than 2 million hungry Ohioans we serve. This modest and humble request represents just \$1.25 per person per month we serve.

Thank you again for your support and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Resources: The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is seeking increased funding in the 2020-21 state biennial budget to support a *Comprehensive Approach to Hunger Relief*. The association's modest request of \$30 million per year represents less than 4 percent of the statewide meal gap of \$797 million. For more information, visit <http://ohiofoodbanks.org/news/budget.php>. To view the Map the Meal Gap report, visit map.feedingamerica.org.

Ohio Food Program and the Agricultural Clearance Program (OFPACP) Evolution

[Independent Economic Impact Analysis](#) of OFPACP and Summer Meal Programs conducted by Dr. Howard Fleeter *(PDF)

[Full-page infographic](#) detailing findings from independent economic impact analysis of OFPACP *(PDF)

[Full-page infographic](#) detailing findings from independent economic impact analysis of OFPACP

Map the Meal Gap 2019 uses data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and food price data and analysis provided by Nielsen, a global provider of information and insights. The study is supported by The Howard G. Buffett Foundation, Conagra Brands Foundation and Nielsen.